

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS

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HAER No. PA-296-A

APOLLO IRON AND STEEL WORKS,
COMPANY HOUSING
Washington Avenue and vicinity
Vandergrift
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

Jet Lowe, photographer, April 1990

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| PA-296-A-1 | PERSPECTIVE VIEW OF COMPANY-BUILT HOUSING ON EAST SIDE OF WASHINGTON AVENUE, VIEWED FROM FRANKLIN AVENUE LOOKING NORTH |
| PA-296-A-2 | VIEW OF NOS. 217 AND 219 WASHINGTON AVENUE LOOKING NORTHEAST, SHOWING WEST FACADES |
| PA-296-A-3 | VIEW OF NOS. 217 AND 219 WASHINGTON AVENUE LOOKING EAST, SHOWING WEST FACADES |

History

McMurtry hired the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted and John Charles Olmsted to design the residential and commercial areas of the town. The Olmsted firm studied the topography of the site--a steeply sloping hillside that rose above the river plain--and developed a plan that included curved streets, grassy medians, and public parks. Many of the houses were built between 1895 and 1905. They were typically two-story wood-frame dwellings with full-length porches and a variety of roof types. Some of the houses contained two-story turrets. Rather than rent the houses, McMurtry's company sold the residences to the workers. As historian David Brody observed, these workers tended to hold the higher skilled jobs and were advanced money by Apollo Iron and Steel for the purchase of their homes. The National Labor Tribune noted that the company's hiring practices favored men who went into debt to acquire their houses.

The residential area of Vandergrift may be divided roughly into three parts: Vandergrift proper, East Vandergrift, and Vandergrift Heights. This area was farmland prior to its development by Apollo Iron and Steel, and is located at a bend in the Kiskiminetas River. The original Olmsted plan called for a series of parallel curving roads in Vandergrift proper, with Vandergrift Heights rising above on two terraced tracts of land each separated by forested hillsides. While much of Olmsted's layout was realized in Vandergrift proper, Vandergrift Heights and particularly East Vandergrift were developed in a largely standard grid plan. The houses in Vandergrift proper are a variety of attached two-story wood-frame residences with gable and hipped roofs. Some of these residences feature two-story turrets. In contrast to this part of town, the residences of East Vandergrift, built from the early 1900s through the 1950s, are more modest. The downtown is located along a three- to four-block area and includes a number of two-story brick buildings erected in the late 1890s and early 1900s.